

## **Waterbury and New Canaan Branch Lines Needs and Feasibility Study**

### **Public Information Meeting**

**Thursday, June 18, 2009**

**6:00 – 8:00 PM**

Ferguson Library  
Main Auditorium  
One Public Library Plaza, Stamford, CT

### **Attendance**

**Advisory Committee Members and Public who signed in:           30 in attendance**

#### **Connecticut Department of Transportation Staff:**

Andrew H. Davis	Intermodal Planning,
Peter Labouliere	Rail Operations
Anna Bergeron	Intermodal Planning

#### **Consultant Team:**

Elizabeth Federico	Parsons Transportation Group
Nick LaRocco	Parsons Transportation Group
Bhoomi Vala	Parsons Transportation Group
Davis Dure	Systra
Mike Morehouse	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.
Leslie Black	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.

### **Meeting Summary**

#### **Welcome and Opening Comments**

Mr. Andrew Davis welcomed everyone to the third of three Waterbury and New Canaan Branch Lines Needs and Feasibility Study Public Information Meetings. He outlined the agenda for the presentation and emphasized the importance of the question and comment period that would follow the presentation to hear from the public regarding the alternatives presented. He then turned the presentation over to Ms. Elizabeth Federico from Parsons Transportation Group.

Ms. Federico discussed the study process and thanked the Study Advisory Committee for their diligence and help with this important initiative. The Study Advisory Committee is comprised of a variety of federal, state, and local agencies, as well as local elected officials, community groups, and key stakeholders.

#### **Presentation**

Ms. Federico discussed the public process further. In addition to Study Advisory Committee meetings, Ms. Federico outlined the various methods of public outreach including a mailing list, comment forms, and a study website where meeting notices and study documents are made available: [www.waterbury-newcanaanrail.org](http://www.waterbury-newcanaanrail.org) . The presentation from this meeting will be available on the website. The study website also provides a comment form under “Contact Us” to receive feedback regarding the study. All public comments will be incorporated into the study process as it moves forward.

Ms. Federico then presented a PowerPoint presentation of the study progress to date reviewing a long list of alternatives under consideration for the New Canaan branch line. She commented that tonight's meeting was an opportunity to hear the public's feedback on the draft alternatives, which are still conceptual in nature at this point in time. Public input is critical to making sure the alternatives are what the community wants to see in the future.

The study team then opened the meeting to the public audience to take questions and comments.

### **Public Question and Comment Period:**

#### **General Comments:**

- What is the timeline of the study and what are the next steps? *The study portion will be completed at the end of 2009. Once the study is completed, recommendations that can be implemented without further environmental study will go to the legislature for funding. For more complex alternatives, a Federal environmental study may be required to secure FTA funding.*
- What factors determine if an EIS is required? *An EIS is required for major infrastructure projects such as a new station at East Main Street in Stamford, or a parking facility of greater than 200 spaces. An EIS is not required for station amenities improvements such as new canopies or for adding extra cars to trains.*
- The short list of alternatives should reflect the priority of recommendations.
- Could the State's special transportation fund be used to fund the branch line improvements? *This fund is primarily directed towards maintenance of existing transportation infrastructure.*
- Don't see any funding opportunities in the near future...what will become of this study?

#### **Current Service Comments:**

- Please complete signalization on the branch line to improve travel times. *Mr. Davis responded that the New Canaan Branch could be signalized in approximately one year, once funds are available.*
- What is the average speed of trains on the branch line? *Mr. LaRocco responded that the average speed is 55 mph.*
- Can the current average speed of travel be improved? What are the speed restrictions? *Speed restrictions are often the result of physical limitations such as curves; however, track speeds on the New Canaan Branch have already been optimized, so this is not really the issue here. The lack of signalization on the northern part of the line just before New Canaan slows travel time along with at grade crossings, curves, and station stops.*
- Double tracking the branch line is too expensive. Put the passing siding back at Springdale where it previously existed.
- A comment regarding ridership identified that trains are full by Glenbrook Station, and that longer trains would help with capacity.
- Some improvements can be implemented with little funding, such as adding canopies to platforms.
- Crowded trains are due to lack of cars. The new M-8 train sets will fix that.
- What is the daily ridership on the New Canaan Branch? *About 2,800.*
- The Springdale siding was removed due to an accident many years ago.

- Trains arriving on the center track in Stamford make transfers difficult...people have to go up and over the tracks. Please look at putting that train back on Track 2 instead of Track 3.

**Bus Service Comments:**

- Consider a shuttle bus as an alternative to fill gaps in service.

**Commuter Rail Comments:**

- DOT works closely with Metro-North. As new M8 cars arrive in 2010, they will be used to expand the fleet and provide relief to ridership congestion.
- Extending New Canaan and Springdale platforms is a good idea for handling longer trains with 6-8 cars and should be a priority.
- Push the proposed East Main Street platform up toward East Main Street as much as possible before the track curve.
- A goal of the service should be more through rides to Grand Central Terminal. Those trains are the most populated.
- Provide a shuttle run from New Canaan to Glenbrook/proposed East Main Street Station to travel back and forth to serve the branch line more frequently and not enter the main line.
- Add siding at Glenbrook to enhance service and frequency of trains.
- Double tracking entire line is expensive...put a passing siding at Springdale instead.
- Consider the demand for reverse-commute trips and add service for that population.
- Consider free service between Glenbrook and Stamford stations to act as a shuttle service.
- There is strong support for a passing siding at Springdale.
- What is the estimated cost of an improvement like the East Main Street Station alternative? *An estimate of \$10 million would provide an initial phase of the station with limited surface parking. Other phases including a parking structure could be added at a later time for a separate, additional cost.*
- Service should run between New York and Glenbrook.
- Springdale passing siding and New Canaan Station rail platform extensions should be priorities.
- East Main Street Station concept should be part of the short list of alternatives.
- The Springdale siding is a good idea, and it will also prevent disable trains from halting service on the branch.
- The trains along the New Canaan Branch Line should be operated in a manner that if East Main Street Station is constructed, more trains could be operated between East Main Street Station and New Canaan Station.

**Pedestrian Safety Comments:**

- Add a walk-across pedestrian access from New Haven line to Glenbrook Station.
- The alternative that creates a pedestrian cross walk around the end of the New Canaan track would be a good fix.
- Commuters using Talmadge Hill station face serious safety issues if they walk along Old Stamford Road, Hoyt Road, or Talmadge Hill Road trying to get to the station. There are no sidewalks, and the area is poorly lit at night. Can this lower-cost safety consideration be completed sooner? *All input will be incorporated into the long list of study alternatives.*
- A Talmadge Hill commuter stated that her calls to the Department of Transportation about safety concerns for bicyclists/pedestrians trying to get to the station have been ignored. Pedestrian

access from the far lot at the top of the hill is not adequate. Commuters are forced to cross the track after crossing gates have been lowered in order to get to the train platform. A second platform at Talmadge Hill should be considered as an alternative. Having the conductor check two sides of the train is more efficient than the queuing line time for a single platform entry. Pedestrian safety would improve if a second platform were added on the east side of the track.

- A suggestion was made to discuss with SWRPA their plans for safe routes to transit.

#### **Parking Comments:**

- A suggestion was made to increase parking rates at New Canaan Branch lots and use the funds to make small-scale improvements.
- Parking is a major concern at Springdale. The station lot has less than 75 spaces and is full every day.
- A request was made to not raise the parking fees; it would be counter-productive to the goal of increasing ridership.
- The East Main Street Station alternative was considered to be a positive option for providing another access point with parking.

#### **Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Comments:**

- The East Main Street area is becoming an urban village. 200 housing units have been recently built and 250 units are to be built. A station in this area that residents could walk to would be a great asset to the area. Providing train service for riders in this area should take priority over shortening a pleasant, 20-minute ride from New Canaan.
- New stations should be planned/designed near shopping centers, river banks, and near Talmadge Hill.
- The areas around Glenbrook and Springdale Stations have adopted new zoning to support and encourage TOD.
- Include Regional Plan Association (RPA) data in study for TOD report. ***In the coming weeks, the study team will be conducting a series of stakeholder meetings to collect data for its TOD Report, to be completed in late summer 2009. RPA will participate in these meetings.***
- Integrate DOT parking analysis with RPA findings.
- Development is a big factor in ridership forecasting and should be reflected in the study.

The formal presentation adjourned at 7:40 p.m. to permit the public to return to the open house stations to view study maps and speak with the study team. The open house stations included:

1. Study process
2. Existing conditions
3. Alternatives for signal and track modifications
4. Alternatives for double-tracking
5. Alternatives for passing sidings
6. Alternatives for stations – new and existing